

MICHIGAN SUPREME COURT



Office of Public Information

contact: Marcia McBrien | (313) 972-3219 or (517) 373-0129

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VOLUNTEER MEDIATORS IN FAMILY LAW CASES TO BE HONORED BY COURT OF APPEALS

GRAND RAPIDS, MI, December 2, 2003 – Twenty-six attorneys from Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Marquette, Okemos, St. Joseph and Traverse City will be honored tonight by the Michigan Court of Appeals for the attorneys' role in settling family law cases pending before that court.

During a reception at the Grand Rapids offices of the law firm of Varnum, Riddering, Schmidt & Howlett, Court of Appeals Chief Judge William Whitbeck and other Court of Appeals judges will present each attorney with a certificate expressing the court's appreciation. The attorneys are members of the State Bar of Michigan's Family Law Section who serve as volunteer mediators, helping parties settle family law disputes.

"We could not offer this service without the good offices of these volunteers," Whitbeck said. "Thanks to them, one in three cases in this program settle, with savings of time, money, and emotional wear and tear for the parties."

The Court of Appeals identifies family law cases shortly after they are filed with the court. A panel of three to four volunteer attorneys read each case to see if the case is a good candidate for the mediation program. Another attorney then serves as mediator.

David Baumhart, the Court of Appeals' Settlement Director, emphasized that mediation does not delay the case's progress through the Court of Appeals and that a case will stay on track if mediation does not work.

Judge Michael J. Talbot, Chair of the Court of Appeals Settlement Committee, said, "The Court of Appeals' goal is to have 95 percent of all cases disposed of within 18 months. Accordingly, in the settlement program, we do not suspend filing or other deadlines."

Talbot said the mediation program does not currently extend to cases involving divorces with children, but that the Court of Appeals will begin including such cases in a pilot program early next year.

The attorneys who will be honored include:
Bruce A. Barnhart, Grand Rapids
Roger W. Boer, Grand Rapids
Jennie Boldish Bryan, Grand Rapids

Jayne A. Dykema, Grand Rapids
Anthony P. Gauthier, Grand Rapids
Mary L. Koewers, Grand Rapids
Norman K. Kravitz, Grand Rapids
Diann J. Landers, Grand Rapids
Donna E. Mobilia, Grand Rapids
Robert B. Relph, Grand Rapids
Richard A. Roane, Grand Rapids
David C. Sarnacki, Grand Rapids
Richard M. Spruit, Grand Rapids
Ann M. Stuursma, Grand Rapids
Connie R. Thacker, Grand Rapids
Diane J. Wechter, Grand Rapids
James W. Zerrenner, Grand Rapids
Robert J. Barnard, Jr., Kalamazoo
W. Jack Keiser, Kalamazoo
Janice K. Cunningham, Lansing
Keldon K. Scott, Lansing
Karl P. Numinen, Marquette
Meri Anne Stowe, Okemos
Deborah L. Berecz, St. Joseph
Robert B. Guyot, III, Traverse City
Charles B. Judson, Traverse City

The reception will take place from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. For directions or other information about the reception, contact JoAnn Yarbrough at (313) 972-5690.

-- MiCOA --